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RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1534
INFO RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 1618

S E C R E T SANAA 000569

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DEPT FOR NEA/ARP:AMACDONALD,
NSC FOR JOHN BRENNAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/01/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDRG](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: ROYG FOLLOW UP ON MARCH 16 BRENNAN-SALEH MEETING

Classified By: Ambassador Stephan A. Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary. Deputy Foreign Minister al-Dhabbi called in Ambassador April 1 to express concern about the outcome of last month's discussion between APDNSA John Brennan and President Saleh on GTMO detainees, and solicit the Ambassador's views as to how we can move this issue forward.

Dhabbi agreed that Yemen can ill-afford to miss the opportunity to demonstrate its readiness to cooperate with the Obama Administration on an issue of such importance, but asked that we appreciate the internal pressures that limit President Saleh's options. Dhabbi repeated Saleh's proposal that the US and KSA coordinate bilaterally on the transfer of Yemeni detainees to the Saudi program, leaving the ROYG out of the deal. He also asked that we consider returning a small number of the least-dangerous detainees in coming weeks as a way for the ROYG to prove its commitment to working effectively with the USG on this issue. We believe the first suggestion, working with Riyadh on a bilateral arrangement, merits follow-up at this time. The second proposal, returning Yemenis to Yemen as a way to break the current impasse with Sana'a, may be something we will want to consider if our discussions with the Saudis fail to produce a way forward. End Summary.

¶2. (S) DFM Moheedin al-Dhabbi, a respected interlocutor with excellent ties to senior ROYG leadership, told the Ambassador at the outset that he understood the Brennan-Saleh March 16 meeting did not go well. Ambassador said that was a fair characterization, recalling Brennan's disappointment that the first high-level contact between the new Administration and the ROYG yielded so little in the way of results. Dhabbi asserted, as Saleh and others have on repeated occasions, that the President cannot publicly agree to send Yemeni detainees to Saudi Arabia. Dhabbi claimed that Islamists and tribal leaders would exploit such concurrence as a sign of weakness on Saleh's part, undermining his authority and ability to manage events in the country. The Saudis know this and are disingenuous in insisting that they need a green light from Saleh to accept Yemenis into their rehab program, he concluded. Better to consider the President's offer for a bilateral US-KSA agreement without Saleh's concurrence, which will allow him to claim he wasn't consulted and avoid much of the most pointed criticism. Dhabbi also urged us to permit the Saudis to provide the necessary financing for construction of a Yemeni rehab facility as an investment in Yemen that Saleh can use to deflect some of the criticism he will inevitably face.

¶3. (S) Dhabbi asked if we might consider sending a handful of the least-dangerous Yemenis in GTMO back to Yemen in fairly short order, to give the ROYG the opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to effectively managing the detainee issue. The Ambassador noted that such a proposal

was sure to meet with stiff resistance at home, as a reward Saleh has done nothing to merit. Ambassador also noted that, were any returns to Yemen to take place, the ROYG would have to be prepared to provide regular, thorough and verifiable updates on each individual's status and whereabouts, unlike the information we receive on those detainees returned to Yemen previously. The Ambassador also asked Dhabbi if the ROYG would consider receiving five of its nationals at the same time as a similar number were sent to Saudi Arabia; Dhabbi repeated that this was not something the ROYG would agree to. &The Yemenis have to come back home first,8 he asserted. The conversation ended with Dhabbi stating that he would convey the substance of the conversation to appropriate figures in the regime, and get back to the Ambassador if he received any counter-proposals.

¶4. (S) Comment. Given al-Dhabbi's ties to the regime, the fact that he undertook to raise the issue with the Ambassador likely reflects a certain realization on the part of the leadership that Saleh's refusal to demonstrate any flexibility on the GTMO-detainee issue further undermined confidence in Washington regarding the ROYG's reliability as a partner. Nevertheless, given what we know of Saleh's nature, we do not/not expect this discomfort to yield much in the way of concessions from the ROYG. That being the case, we believe it may be time to revisit with the Saudis their insistence that Saleh publicly agree to permit Yemeni detainees to enter the KSA rehab program, given the repeated assertion, including from the President himself, that the more acceptable approach would be a US-KSA bilateral agreement that protects him from being accused of complicity in a plan that sends Yemeni nationals to another country rather than bringing them home. Should those conversations fail to produce a way forward, we may wish to consider sending a couple of the least-dangerous Yemenis to Yemen as a way to break the impasse with the ROYG. End Comment.
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